

Washington

A Sadder and Wiser Young President

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By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, April 20—President Kennedy has taken the defeat in Cuba with the utmost seriousness. Behind his brave words to the editors today is a mood of self-examination and self-criticism.

In the first place, he is not looking for scapegoats. He is taking full personal responsibility for the Government's part in the adventure, and this responsibility, of course, is great.

He took the decision to continue the training of the Cuban refugees with arms provided by the Government, and for releasing the ships and gasoline to launch the attack at this time.

He did so against the advice of Secretary of State Rusk and Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles. He did so on the basis of an intelligence estimate by the Central Intelligence Agency which was convinced that Cuba was ripe for revolt.

Other intelligence estimates by the allies challenged the C. I. A. analysis, but Kennedy went along with the C. I. A. without arguing but the differences in the Cabinet or the National Security Council.

The Useful Lessons

Publicly, the President said nothing today about errors committed here. He talked about the "useful lessons" of this "sebering episode" but he is drawing more lessons than he mentioned.

One of these is that the whole system of intelligence analysis within the Government must be speedily reviewed. The Central Intelligence Agency is a vast organization with some 10,000 employees in Washington and several thousand more overseas or outside the Federal capital.

The question naturally arises how it could be that this apparatus, with all its access to Cuba and to friendly nations within the hemisphere, could be so sure that the Cubans would revolt, and be so wrong on the critical point of judgment.

Kennedy is not blaming Allen Dulles, the Director of the C. I. A., or Edgar, Deputy, Richard M. Helms Jr., who made the principal presentation of the intelligence estimate to Kennedy. But he does want to know where they went wrong.

The Kennedy system of reaching decisions of this nature is also very much under review. When he came into office, he questioned the usefulness of the National Security Council, which is a Cabinet committee, with its own staff, charged with making recommendations to the President on foreign and defense policy questions.

His view was that these Cabinet meetings were a waste of time, so that he has virtually dispensed with them and substituted instead a series of bilateral and ad hoc meetings with one or two Cabinet members or members of the White House staff.

This may or may not be an improvement on the old system but in any event, there is a feeling in some quarters here that the Cuban decision was not "staffed through" as well as it should have been before the decision was made to let it proceed. Whether this is a valid point is a matter of opinion, but the fact is that immediately after the Cuban failure, the President did call a Cabinet meeting for this week and summoned the National Security Council to the White House next Saturday.

The Old Assumptions

Thus, he is ending his third month in office in anything but a dogmatic mood. Events have shaken many of the assumptions he brought into the White House with about the magnitude and complexity of his problems and the best procedures for meeting them.

His confidence in the direction of the C. I. A. has clearly been shaken, and will almost certainly be changed. His confidence in the effectiveness of the inter-American system to deal with Communist operations in the hemisphere has also been shaken, and the Allies will be hearing more from him on this in the coming weeks.

Yet there is nothing harmful or hasty in his reaction. He noted quickly and clearly that the Cuban situation was a new one. He recognized the extent of the mistake. He is not a man who is easily shaken. He is a man who is a realist. He is a man who is a leader. He is a man who is a man.